

# PRINCIPLES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## Policies Underlying the Guidelines

The design guidelines in this document incorporate principles set forth in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties — a widely accepted set of basic preservation design principles. This document is compatible with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, while expanding on how these basic preservation principles apply in Georgetown. See Appendix B for these standards.

### The concept of historic significance

What makes a property historically significant? It is generally recognized that a certain amount of time must pass before the historical significance of a property can be evaluated. The National Register, for example, suggests that a property be at least 50 years old or have extraordinary importance before it may be considered. Georgetown also employs the "50-year" guideline; however, structures that are more recent may be considered significant if they are found to have special architectural or historical merit. Also, in the future other events, time periods, areas or districts may become historically significant to the city and could be designated as an historic structure or district.

A property may be significant for one or more of the following reasons:

- Association with events that contributed to the broad patterns of history, the lives of significant people, or the understanding of Georgetown's prehistory or history.
- Construction and design associated with distinctive characteristics of a building type, period, or construction method.
- An example of an architect or master craftsman or an expression of particularly high artistic values.
- Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

### Period of significance

Every historic building has a period of significance—or the time span during which it gained architectural, historical, or geographical importance. In most cases, a property is significant because it represents or is associated with a particular period in history. Frequently, this begins with the construction of the building and continues through the peak of early occupation. Portions of the building fabric and features that date from the period of significance typically contribute to the character of the structure.

Historic districts also have a period of significance. The Town Square Historic District, for example, has a period of significance which spans approximately 45 years (1885 to 1930). Throughout this period, the city witnessed construction of a number of buildings and alterations that have become significant. Conversely, structures built after this period are not considered as significant, although some may contribute to the overall character, or ambience, of the district.

### Concept of "integrity"

In addition to being historically significant, a property also must have integrity—a sufficient percentage of the structure must date from the period of significance. The majority of the building's structural system and its materials should date from that time and its key character-defining features also should remain intact. These may include architectural details, such as dormers and porches, ornamental brackets and moldings, and materials, as well as the overall mass and form of the building. It is these elements that allow a building to be recognized as a product of its time.

## The Basic Preservation Principles for Georgetown

While the guidelines provide direction for specific design issues, some basic principles of preservation form the foundation for them. The following preservation principles apply in Georgetown:

### **1. Respect the historic design character of the building.**

Do not try to change a building's style or make it look older than it really is. Confusing the character by mixing elements of different styles is not appropriate.

### **2. Seek uses that are compatible with the historic character of the building.**

Although use is not reviewed by the Historic and Architectural Review Commission, uses that do not require radical alteration of the original architecture are preferred. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for the building that will require minimal alteration to it or its site. An example of an appropriate adaptive use is converting a residence into a bed and breakfast establishment (when zoning regulations permit).

### **3. Protect and maintain significant features and stylistic elements.**

Distinctive stylistic features or examples of

skilled craftsmanship should be treated with sensitivity. The best preservation procedure is to maintain historic features through proper maintenance from the outset so that intervention is not required. This includes rust removal, caulking, limited paint removal, and reapplication of paint.

### **4. Preserve key, character-defining features of the property.**

Key features are those that help convey the character of the resource as it appeared during its period of historic significance. These may include the basic structural system and building materials, as well as windows, doors, porches, and ornamentation. Typically, those features that are on the front of a building or that are highly visible from a public way will be most important.

### **5. Repair deteriorated historic features, and replace only those elements that cannot be repaired.**

Maintain the existing material, using recognized preservation methods whenever possible. If disassembly is necessary for repair or restoration, use methods that minimize damage to original materials and replace the existing configuration.

## Developing a Preservation Strategy

Each preservation project is unique. A project may include a variety of treatment techniques, including the repair and replacement of features and maintenance of those already in good condition. In order to define the range of preservation treatments that may be needed in a project, consider these steps:

### **1. Research the history of the property.**

This analysis should begin with an investigation of the history of the property. This may identify design alterations that have occurred and may help in developing an understanding of the significance of the building as a whole as well as its individual components.

### **2. Assess existing conditions.**

Historical research should be combined with an on-site assessment of existing conditions. In this inspection, identify those elements that are original and those that have been altered. Also determine the condition of individual building components.

### **3. List use requirements.**

Finally, list the requirements for continued use of the property. Is additional space needed? Or should the work focus on preserving and maintaining the existing configuration?

### **4. Summarize a preservation strategy.**

By combining an understanding of the history of the building, its present condition, and the need for action, one can then develop a preservation approach.

## **Defining preservation treatments**

When developing a preservation strategy, consider the application of these terms:

### **Maintenance**

Work that often focuses on keeping the property in good working condition by repairing features as deterioration becomes apparent, using procedures that retain the original character and finish of the features is considered maintenance. In some cases, preventive maintenance is executed prior to noticeable deterioration. No alteration or reconstruction is involved. Property owners are strongly encouraged to maintain their property in good condition so that more aggressive measures of rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction are not needed.

### **Preservation**

Keeping an existing building in its current state by a careful program of maintenance and repair is preservation. It will often include repair and stabilization of materials and features in addition to regularly scheduled maintenance. Essentially, the property is kept in its current good condition.

### **Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation is the process of returning a property to a condition which makes a contemporary use possible while still preserving those portions or features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural values. Rehabilitation may include the adaptive use of the building and constructing additions. Most

good preservation projects in Georgetown may be considered rehabilitation projects.

### **Restoration**

To restore, one reproduces the appearance of a building exactly as it looked at a particular moment in time; to reproduce a pure style - either interior or exterior. This process may include the removal of later work or the replacement of missing historic features. A restoration approach is used on missing details or features of an historic building when the features are determined to be particularly significant to the character of the structure and when the original configuration is accurately documented.

### **Renovation**

To renovate means to improve by repair, to revive. Renovation is similar to rehabilitation, although it includes the use of some new materials and elements. The basic character and significant details are respected and preserved, but some sympathetic alterations may also occur. Alterations that are made are generally reversible, should future owners wish to restore the building to its original design.

### **Adaptive use**

Converting a building to a new use that is different from its original purpose is considered to be adaptive use. For example, converting a residential structure to offices is adaptive use. A good adaptive use project retains the historic character of the building while accommodating new functions.

While adaptive use allows the building owner to convert the building to a purpose other than that for which it was designed, it should be done with respect to the original building form. For example, it would be inappropriate to turn the living room of an historic building into a bathroom. The reason for this is that when the programmatic uses of a building are drastically altered, this often results in a major change to the original floor plan as well as to the exterior appearance of the building. When adaptive use is the preferred preservation alternative, the proposed design should make use of the original building function as closely as possible.

## Remodeling

To remake or to make over the design image of a building is to remodel it. The appearance is changed by removing original detail and by adding new features that are out of character with the original. Remodeling is inappropriate for historic buildings in Georgetown.

## The Preferred Sequence of Preservation Actions

Once the basic approach to a project has been defined, it is important to assess the property and to identify any significant character-defining features and materials. Retaining these elements, and then using the guidelines to select an appropriate treatment mechanism will greatly enhance the overall quality of the preservation project. In making the selection follow this sequence:

1. If a feature is intact and in good condition, maintain it as such.
2. If the feature is deteriorated or damaged, repair it to its original condition.
3. If it is not feasible to repair the feature, then replace it with one that is the same or similar in character (materials, detail, finish) to the original one. Replace only that portion which is beyond repair.
4. If the feature is missing entirely, reconstruct it from appropriate evidence.
5. If a new feature or addition is necessary, design it in such a way as to minimize the impact on original features.

## The Preferred Sequence of Preservation Actions

